

Pentecost 4B

Close your eyes and try to imagine the time just before the big bang. There is nothing! No light, no movement, no sound, no life. We cannot really imagine nothing. Things always start sliding in.

Now, try to imagine the creative energy that initiated all that is: the energy, the power, the glory, the wonder, the goodness and the delight. It was an imagination so great that it would produce sunshine, gravity, butterflies, majestic oaks, time and space, the phases of the moon, rainbows and galaxies. Now open your eyes.

What did you see there in your imagination?

We can see parts. Nevertheless, we cannot grasp the power of creation. Or the one who created it. Even though it is right before our eyes.

Romans 1 tells us, "But the basic reality of God is plain enough. Open your eyes and there it is! By taking a long and thoughtful look at what God has created, people have always been able to see what their eyes as such can't see: eternal power, and the mystery of his divine being. So nobody has a good excuse". The message.

It's all there for us to see. Yet, even when we try, we take in just a smidgen of it. It reminds me of the parables. Parables are also mysterious and beyond our complete grasp. A timeless definition of a parable is: an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. We can understand the earthly part, a bit, it's the heavenly meaning that can evade us.

Jesus was the master minded craftsman, shaping words into parables. And here is the thing about parables: when we hear something, our normal reaction is to immediately judge its application and usefulness in our lives. Is this strange or familiar? Do I agree or disagree? Useful or not? If it is not useful, familiar or agreeable, we quickly dismiss it.

The parables of Jesus circumvent these kinds of snap judgements precisely because there is no clear and definite ending. It leaves the listener in a place of imagination, digging for interpretations and meanings.

Even though we cannot understand fully, parables are meant to provoke pondering, ideas and possibilities. The first parable today is about the mystery of a seed sprouting and growing. Jesus says "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head". Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear.

How do you hear this parable? What might the seed represent?

You could think of the seed as the word of God in the scriptures. It is something we have been given.

Is it enough that it is given to us?

No. It is also something we have to find for ourselves and apply in our lives. It applies equally to the individual, the body and the life of the church.

Unplanted seeds do nothing. The seed must be planted. It needs to be planted in good soil, which could be thought of as our receptive hearts. Once planted, an unknown process takes over in our

hearts. The earth does it all by itself without our help. It's a process that we cannot control or even understand. It just happens! Our part is simply to plant the seed and trust that process. To have faith. To have patience. And then, when the time is right, to jump in and do what is needed - harvest the grain.

What does it mean to harvest that grain?

We must be watching and waiting for our opportunity. Opportunities come, but usually not in the places we expect for them to. That is why we need to be watching for the ripeness. Part of the way we do this is to place ourselves where God is working in the world, instead of where we feel we should be working on our own. God is at work and God needs our help! The process is not about what we do or our individual development, it is about how our own ripeness may be harvested as bread for others. Soon in this service, we will receive the bread. Its purpose is to be taken in by us and then given out to others.

We do not have to do the whole job, beginning to end. As part of the body, we use the gifts we are given, while others use theirs. In the end, God's kingdom will come.

Then we come to that famous parable of the mustard seed.

What does that parable say?

It states that the kingdom of God 'is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs'.

The seeds of the kingdom are often small and unimpressive. But like the mustard seed, can grow into a large shrub, offering a much-needed place of safety and hospitality. This small seed can grow, and grow, into something life-giving for others. And this often happens without our knowledge of it.

There is one, single mustard seed in this parable. Multiply that by millions of seeds, millions of animals upon this earth, millions of stars in the sky.

The divinity, the imagination and the love of God are contained within each seed that sprouts, each gaze into the night time sky, each smile on the face of one you pass. It is reproduced over and over. It is all there for us to see his majesty and the mystery.

If you can somehow believe all this, without knowing the ways and methods . . . then you are on your way to hearing, marking and digesting the parables of Jesus. Ponder all these things in your heart.

And whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.